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ABSTRACT

The report notes the existence of secondary programing for learning disabled students of widely divergent goals, emphases, organization, and intervention strategies. They propose seven major programing goals which constitute a holistic approach. Each goal is considered in terms of obstacles to its implementation and suggestions for intervention: (1) awareness, development and acceptance of personal strengths and limitations; (2) development of personal control and goal setting skills; (3) development of efficient problem solving and self monitoring strategies; (4) development and/or refinement of basic skills and individually relevant content area competencies; (5) development and/or refinement of social skills; (6) knowledge of personal rights and resources; and (7) exploration of career opportunities compatible with personal attributes and preferences. Six pages of references conclude the document. (CL)

Secondary Learning Disability Programs: What Should We Be Doing?

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ABSTRACT

Special Education programs for learning disabled adolescents have expanded dramatically in recent years. This development has occurred in the absence of professional consensus and, in some instances, without sufficient attention to students' comprehensive needs. In this article, seven major programming goals representing a holistic perspective are proposed. Factors inhibiting attention to these goals are examined and suggestions for collaborative intervention are offered.

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Recent focus on education and the resulting "effective schools movement" has prompted interest in program review throughout the profession. In the field of learning disabilities, this movement, together with significant increases in the number of LD students served and indications of their difficulties encountered during the adolescent-adult transition, document a need for serious reflection. To illustrate the staggering growth, during the 1976-77 school year 797,213 learning disabled students received Special Education services (Education of the Handicapped, 1984). By 1984-85, 1,822,910 were served under PL 94-142 (Education of the Handicapped, 1985). How many of these students are truly learning disabled as opposed to those misplaced because of underachievement due to other factors is unclear and represents an important issue examined by researchers and professional groups (See Algozzine and Korinek, 1985). Yet apart from this dramatic increase, Gerber (1984) noted that "Over 1.6 million American children are being treated as learning disabled, and their school experiences are often drastically changed without unequivocal demonstration that such changes benefit them over the course of their public school education or produce desirable, long-term life outcomes" (p. 122). It is this charge of unvalidated program changes that is incompatible with the present focus of the effective school movement and the vitality of our field.

As a subset of all LD services, educators providing programs for secondary students are likely to find rigorous program review unsettling. Developing more recently due to the persisting disabilities of students identified in the elementary grades along with newly discovered cases, the past few years could be characterized as a game of "catch-up." To illustrate, in 1975 approximately 9% of school divisions surveyed were providing services for learning disabled adolescents (Scranton and Downs, 1975). Although statistics by each individual age are not maintained by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education, approximately one third of the total number of all handicapped students served are believed to be in secondary programs. Given that 44% of all handicapped students served under PL 94-142 during 1984-85 were classified as learning disabled, a rough estimate of the number of secondary LD students served would be 604,836.

Until recently, the rapid growth experienced at the secondary level left little time for curriculum planning. Cruickshank (1981) observed that "The adolescent with learning disabilities is one for whom little or no planning has been done in any coordinated manner -- nationally, at the state level or locally" (p. 239). On the issue of specific interventions, Alley and his colleagues concluded that "...most field practices for these adolescents have been

based largely on clinical beliefs and non-validated models of assessment and instruction" (Alley et al., 1983, p. 1).

There is some evidence to support these views. From an early literature review of secondary LD curricula, Touzel (1978) reported that few programs had a written statement of goals and the curriculum focus reflected preferences of the teacher or program director. More recently, Brozovich and Kotting (1984) found that 52% of the 87 special educators surveyed at the high school level (which included 34 LD teachers) reported that their school district lacked a written description of program goals and objectives.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING?

Specifications for what constitutes an appropriate educational program for learning disabled adolescents have been the focus of much discussion and several investigations (Alley et al., 1983; Chesler, 1982; Cordoni, 1984; Cronin and Gerber, 1982; Cruickshank, 1981 Schumaker et al., 1983; Sherbenou and Holub, 1982; Touzel, 1978; Wiederholt, 1978; and Will, 1984a). To answer the question, "What should we be doing?" requires clarity of long-term general educational goal(s) or, more specifically, what we want learning disabled students to be able to do once they leave high school. This decision also requires knowledge of the general, yet diverse, characteristics of learning disabled adolescents.

With regard to general educational goals, Will (1984b) noted that they should be the same for disabled and non-disabled students. That is, enhancing their " ...ability to lead productive adult lives and to be integrated in this heterogeneous society, independent of undue reliance on others" (p. 12). However, Knowles (1978) pointed out that leading productive adult lives involves competent functioning across seven life roles (i.e., learner, self with a unique identity, friend, citizen, family member, worker and leisure-time user). Acknowledgement of these multiple roles indicates a need for education (including any specialized intervention) to be considered as a collaborative venture undertaken throughout life in varied situations and settings (ACLD Newsbriefs, 1985). At the secondary level, this ecological view calls for partnerships involving students, teachers, families, peers, employers, and community service providers. It questions the wisdom of reliance on disjointed, single-focused programs operating from a restricted temporal perspective.

Although continued research that will generate a more accurate portrait of disabled adolescents is needed, characteristics which may influence successful functioning across their life roles have been investigated through a number of independent efforts (Alley et al., 1983; Chesler, 1982; Cronin and Gerber, 1982; Schumaker et al., 1983;

Sherbenou and Holub, 1982; White, 1985). Together, characteristics documented by these researchers include: persisting academic deficits, cognitive inefficiencies, difficulty generalizing across settings, inadequate study skills, social skill deficiencies, and occupational immaturity and/or dissatisfaction.

Early and Current Program Foci

During the early development of secondary LD programs, Touzel (1978) used a three-round Delphi survey of 17 experts to seek consensus concerning desirable program foci. The four broad areas receiving high or moderate agreement were

1. survival skills (77% indicated high agreement; 15% moderate);
2. individualization of student needs and goals (69% indicated high agreement; 23% moderate);
3. career and vocational development (69% indicated high agreement; 15% moderate); and
4. development of a healthy self-concept (62% indicated high agreement; 31% moderate) (pp. 54 and 56).

In reality, examination of the various programs currently used at the secondary level reveals considerable divergence in goals, emphasis, organization and intervention strategies. Although unitary focus is seldom found, Alley

and Deshler (1979) noted sufficient differences that permit categorization of at least five alternative foci (i.e., basic skills, tutorial, vocationally oriented, compensatory, and learning strategies).

Although Alley and Deshler found that 51% of the respondents in their secondary program survey reported a basic skills focus, there is no empirical evidence to justify a clear-cut unitary preference. Inspection of these different models reveals features that are appealing and appropriate under various circumstances. Each has inherent drawbacks that require careful review since adoption of any one approach may "close the door" on specific career and life options.

Should Programs Be Re-Examined?

From a holistic perspective, "...learning is generated within individual learners and occurs as a direct result of students' active participation in solving conflicts between their perception of a given situation and their observation of the data" (Poplin, 1984, p. 291). Here, the operatives are **active, individual problem solving**. The objective is not how many isolated facts, concepts and skills can be acquired and retained, but rather how understandings and skills can be discovered and integrated into a personal repertoire for solving real-life problems. To achieve this may require

re-evaluation of current program foci in terms of their personal relevance for present and future life roles.

Reports from program graduates concerning secondary experiences and post-school adjustments can be instructive. Levin et al., (1985) found a relatively high dropout rate for 52 LD adolescents whose progress and school status were examined four years after entering the 9th grade. Of the 11 dropouts available for interview, the most frequently cited reason for leaving school early was being asked to go because of poor attendance and disruptive behavior. Preference for non-school activities, financial need, and peer influence accounted for the others' decisions. Seventy-three percent of the dropouts were unemployed although some were participating in alternative educational programs.

White and his colleagues (1982) also provided information regarding post-school adjustment through their comparison of 47 learning disabled and 59 non-disabled individuals. Results indicated that the young learning disabled adults were less satisfied with their junior and senior high school experiences, now held jobs with lower status, were less involved in social and recreational activities, had fewer plans for future educational activities and were using more prescribed medicine than their non-disabled peers.

Finally, Chesler's summary of findings from ACLD's survey on LD adults (1982) provided insights to areas where assistance was considered most needed. Inspection of the 10 most frequently cited needs listed below indicates support for a holistic educational perspective.

1. "Social relationships, skills
2. Career counseling
3. Develop self-esteem, confidence
4. Overcome dependence, survival
5. Vocational training
6. Job getting and holding
7. Reading
8. Spelling
9. Management of personal finances
10. Organizational skills" (p. 23).

Reformulated as goal statements for learning disabled adolescents, these might be --

1. Awareness, development and acceptance of personal strengths and limitations;
2. Development of personal control and goal setting skills;
3. Development of efficient problem solving and self-monitoring strategies;

4. Development and/or refinement of basic skills and individually relevant content area competencies;
5. Development and/or refinement of social skills;
6. Knowledge of personal rights and resources; and
7. Exploration of career opportunities compatible with personal attributes and preferences.

A brief discussion of each goal follows.

Understanding Personal Strengths and Limitations. Awareness of personal attributes is a key factor influencing one's motivation to learn. For many learning disabled adolescents there is uncertainty concerning the nature of their specific disability. Even more alarming is the fact that these students often view themselves as intellectually subnormal and attribute their academic difficulties to their own lack of effort. Repeated failures, being labeled as learning disabled, and doubt as to the nature of their disorder may further influence their self-image (Schneider, 1984).

Apart from students' personal doubts, parental pessimism toward their child's future may adversely affect their parent-child relationship and the child's self-esteem (Wright and Stimmel, 1984). This, together with teachers' lack of understanding of students' disabilities, may contribute to additional feelings of confusion and self-doubt.

To overcome these constraints, educators and parents need opportunities for increasing their understanding of learning disabled adolescents. For parents, this may include knowledge of community resources and specific suggestions for effective home-based interventions that capitalize on the adolescents' strengths. Both parents and regular educators may also need more information on students' particular characteristics and specific instructional strategies that acknowledge and capitalize on students' strengths and address their limitations (Ammer, 1984).

Specific actions to generate increased student awareness of personal strengths and limitations may include:

1. A joint review of the student's case file,
2. Identification and discussion of the student's strengths and limitations,
3. A joint review of strategies that may be used to communicate special needs and negotiate accommodations, and
4. A joint discussion of ways to monitor personal success and failure.

Personal Control and Goal Setting. Independence is an integral aspect of adult life which is developed through opportunities for making decisions and setting achievable goals. Without these opportunities, students may not develop a personal rationale for learning (i.e., the "why" and "what for" of their education) and may experience slow progress.

Specification of behavioral goals greatly increases the chance for learning disabled students to succeed (Knowles, 1980).

Learning disabled adolescents who have been unsuccessful in academic settings may fail to set goals for fear of more failure. Their previous learning experiences may have taught them to distrust themselves, and to depend on others for their decisions. This lack of self-confidence may be the result of an overprotective or overly critical environment when important decisions are made and the learning disabled student's input is not encouraged (e.g., IEP decisions). This reinforces dependence and lack of initiative. Another factor may be others' reluctance to allow learning disabled adolescents to participate in situations requiring independence because of accompanying supervision responsibilities (Arnold, 1984). By deemphasizing opportunities for promoting independence, students are inhibited from acquiring critical decision making and problem solving skills.

Providing successful learning experiences within the family can be critical for maintaining emotional stability when learning disabled adolescents are coping with negative experiences in other settings. A sense of worthiness can be developed by successfully performing family responsibilities such as mowing the yard or budgeting one's allowance.

However, simply assigning a task does not guarantee success or perceptions of competence. Therefore, to increase the likelihood for success, specific components of the task will need to be clearly identified.

Given the likelihood for success, adolescents need opportunities to "try it on their own." Follow-up discussions to evaluate outcomes and identify continuing needs should be encouraged. In this way, failures can be used constructively rather than as further confirmation of personal inadequacies.

Problem Solving and Self-Monitoring. There is some evidence that learning disabled individuals appear to be inactive learners who fail to activate learning and problem solving strategies spontaneously (Bos and Filip, 1984; Schumaker et al., 1983; Torgesen, 1980; Wong and Jones, 1982). This difficulty also has been described as the inability "...to create and apply a strategy to a novel problem" (Schumaker et al., 1983, p. 48). While the specific nature of these difficulties is unclear (Johnson, 1984; Loper and Hallahan, 1982), failure to approach educational tasks systematically frequently results in poor school performance. This is evidenced in inefficient study and self-monitoring skills.

Loper and Hallahan (1982) stated that those "...who are taught strategies for learning and who become more aware of

their own active role in the learning process are more able to apply strategies and rules learned in one situation to another situation" (p. 63). With this optimism, a number of interventions have been suggested. Cook and Slife (1985) recommended that problem solving be studied as any other subject with daily instruction in specific aspects of the process. They stressed, however, that to be effective these problems should have relevance and capitalize on students' natural "...motivation to overcome obstacles" (p. 6). This precludes strict adherence to pre-packaged problem solving programs.

In an effort to have learning disabled students more actively involved in learning, Hallahan and Sapona (1983) recommended the use of cognitive behavior modification (CBM) which is "...the modification of overt behavior through the manipulation of covert thought processes" (p. 616). CBM is thought to organize or provide the structure for information to be "acquired, stored, retrieved, and manipulated by the human organism" (Hall, 1980, p. 12).

An underlying assumption in CBM is that youngsters can be taught to use efficient learning, problem solving, and self-monitoring strategies such as: questioning themselves while reading to improve comprehension (Bos and Filip, 1984; Kendall and Mason, 1982); monitoring on-task behavior (Hallahan et al., 1982); rehearsing, coding, imaging,

reflecting, chunking, categorizing, etc. (Jacobs, 1984); and using mediation (Harth et al., 1981). In practice, students may need opportunities to describe how they approach a task in order to identify faulty logic, inappropriate procedures, lack of necessary decision information and misunderstandings.

Since the generalizability of problem solving and self-monitoring strategies has not been substantiated, teachers should seek evidence from observations, teacher and parent feedback, work samples, grades, etc. that these skills are being used in other settings.

Academic Development. The development and refinement of basic academic skills and individually relevant content area competencies is a prerequisite for successful functioning in school and in many life roles. This need is evident by the time a student enters junior high school where "...instruction is predominantly through lecture and independent reading tasks, and testing is almost exclusively based on formats that require reading and writing" (Sherbenou and Holub, 1982, p. 42). The secondary school situation is largely incompatible with the needs of learning disabled adolescents whose achievement continues to be three to five years below grade placement (Levin et al, 1985; Warner et al., 1980). Yet, academic development may not be a priority for these students.

One factor limiting attention to basic skills and content relevancy is the imposed organizational structure at the secondary level (e.g., scheduling, credit requirements, departmentalization, grading policies). Here, LD students' motivation for a basic skills focus may be insufficient given the competing need to graduate and/or complete specific content area courses. This restricted temporal focus may be shared by parents, teachers, and counselors as well.

Unfortunately, program decisions regarding instructional focus do not always reflect students' past educational experiences and progress. On this point, Meyen and Lehr (1980) cautioned that failure to provide sufficient instructional intensity may result in handicapped learners having to accept the "... personal costs of living a life inhibited by marginal performance" (p. 23).

Apart from the issue of curriculum foci, learning disabled adolescents often find themselves in undifferentiated content area classes where personal relevance or clarity of instruction is lacking. Here, performance expectations may be derived from instructional guides, text materials, and/or teacher preferences rather than from student needs. Despite these potential constraints, it is erroneous to assume that all students with severe basic skill deficits are disinterested or cannot achieve in content area classes.

At the secondary level, a decision to abandon or continue basic skills instruction must be made. Such a decision should be based on a longitudinal profile of the student's achievement and future expectations. Meyen and Lehr (1980) advocated a thorough review of the nature and intensity of past instruction to establish a more accurate understanding of students' current achievement. With this information to guide curricula decisions (rather than the number of years spent in school), they concluded that many more LD adolescents are likely to benefit from intensive academic remediation. These authors acknowledged that certain conditions (e.g., lower pupil-teacher ratios, flexible scheduling) must be present for this to occur.

Even though severe basic skill deficits may persist, LD adolescents should not be deprived of information they can understand and use. However, for such students to succeed in content area classes, it may be necessary to teach efficient learning strategies (e.g., organizational skills, test and note-taking skills, task and time management, mnemonics, computer use, problem solving, self-evaluation, etc.) that may be generalized. Coupled with learning strategies, modifications of regular class requirements and/or configurations may need to be made without compromising the integrity of the course. Such modifications might include pairing a regular and LD teacher for a content

area class, using peer tutoring and/or cooperative learning groups, contracting for grades, alternative texts, texts on tape, advance organizers, tape recorded lectures, carbon copied notes, verbal elaboration of written work, projects in lieu of reports, self-paced instruction, untimed tests, breaks during tests, etc.

To maximize educational outcomes, flexibility must be infused in many aspects of the secondary program (Merulla and McKinnon, 1982; Will, 1984b). With freedom to use approaches such as expanded placement options, preferential scheduling, and alternative curriculum structures (e.g., scheduling the regular geography course for two semesters versus one), opportunities for academic development will be enhanced.

Social Skills. Successful societal functioning requires social interaction; however social limitations have been well documented among LD adolescents (Matthews et al., 1982). Deschler (1983) found LD adolescents less likely to participate in extracurricular and out-of-school activities. This limited participation may result in inadequate opportunities to identify important skills and to develop and use the necessary competencies across settings. Without instruction, practice and constructive feedback, learning disabled adolescents may fail to gain sufficient self-confidence for spontaneous use of important social skills.

Professionals agree that appropriate social skills influence academic achievement, facilitate mainstreaming efforts, improve employment opportunities and enhance necessary interpersonal relationships throughout life. However, there is a lack of consensus regarding which skills are essential and how they should be assessed, developed, and maintained (Bornstein et al., 1977; Irvine et al., 1978; Laurie et al., 1978; Schumaker and Hazel, 1984; Zigmond, 1978).

It is clear that not all learning disabled adolescents display social deficiencies (Schumaker et al., 1982). Of those who do, their difficulties may not be observed in all areas. Although training efforts have been successful, newly acquired social skills are not necessarily generalized to other environments (Schumaker and Ellis, 1982). Given the literature on learning disabled adolescents and adults and their expressed concerns for skill development (Chesler, 1982), increased attention to these needs may be necessary.

In order to plan intervention, students' social inefficiencies must be identified within the context of their ecological system. To document specific needs, it may be necessary to discuss interpersonal concerns with individual students as well as their parents and other significant persons. This information can provide the basis for clear

delineation of goals and objectives to be included in the IEP.

Development of social skills will require as much systematic effort and elaboration as basic skill or content area instruction. To be effective the program should:

1. identify specific social skill deficiencies,
2. offer feedback regarding the need for behavior change,
3. provide specific instructions for modifying behaviors,
4. provide oppurtunities to rehearse appropriate social behaviors with immediate feedback and
5. promote practice of newly acquired social behaviors in a variety of relevant environmental settings.

Using the above model, it is important to recognize that current program options inadvertently may be creating social distance between learning disabled adolescents and their peers. Classroom strategies such as cooperative learning may be used to generate a more constructive classroom environment and increased social acceptance (Johnson and Johnson, 1981; Slavin, 1984; and Wang et al., 1984). Strain et al., (1984) concluded that non-handicapped peers may be ignoring or even punishing the social overtures of learning disabled students. Therefore, inservice programs for classroom teachers and non-handicapped students may be necessary to help them develop an understanding of their role in influencing

learning disabled students' social status. From an ecological perspective, in addition to training in specialized settings, all significant persons will need to be aware of the five-step training model, know what new behaviors to expect from the learning disabled adolescent and be able to provide the appropriate reinforcers.

Personal Rights and Resources. To take advantage of educational, career and other life opportunities, learning disabled adolescents need to be aware of special legislation and policies that safeguard their rights while in school and later as adults. Consistent with the goal for independence, they should be informed of their right to participate actively in the IEP process and encouraged to do so. This may require discussions regarding the importance of participation and how to communicate their ideas and needs effectively in this adult dominated group. Students should know of their right to work toward a regular high school diploma and of accommodations that can be made to enable them to demonstrate proficiency in regular classes and on minimum competency and college admissions tests. Specific accommodations (e.g., extended time to complete assignments and tests, alternative response formats, test location, etc.) should be agreed upon at the IEP meeting (Pullin, 1980).

Students also need to be familiar with specific protections afforded them under PL 93-112, Section 504, The

Rehabilitation Act of 1983 (such as program accessibility and non-discriminatory employment requirements) and similar state mandates. Individuals with severe learning disabilities may require information regarding vocational rehabilitation services available through the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Gerber, 1981). Stout (1983) outlined specific consumer information that could be informative for students, their families and teachers. These services may provide a much needed bridge for successful adolescent-adult transitions.

In addition to knowledge of personal rights, learning disabled adolescents should be familiar with local, state and national services and support groups. This might include colleges offering LD services, state employment agencies, LD youth and adult support groups, local adult education programs, special library services, and consumer services (e.g., tax preparation, legal assistance, secretarial support, etc.).

Career Awareness. Awareness of career opportunities compatible with personal attributes and preferences is important for career planning and preparation and leads to competent functioning across life roles. Although career education opportunities are expanding, current programs may not sufficiently accommodate the handicapped (Clark, 1980; MacArthur, et al., 1982). This may be due, in part, to a lack

of knowledge and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Halpern (1985) noted that the task of coordinating vocational and special education services was not clearly delineated within many school districts. He also found that special education teachers feel inadequate in their knowledge related to vocational education. Similarly, vocational educators have reported a need for better understanding of special needs students (Albright and Hux, 1981).

Without assistance from knowledgeable individuals, learning disabled adolescents' career aspirations and occupational decisions may not coincide with their capabilities and interests. To achieve a more suitable match requires comprehensive career assessment. Mori (1982) expressed concern about this issue, noting that career assessment programs are often inadequate and fail to reflect a comprehensive developmental perspective.

Just as with academic development, career planners need access to LD students' longitudinal performance profiles including interests, aptitudes, values, habits, and skills. These data can be used to achieve a better match between personal attributes, career decisions, and preparation opportunities.

SUMMARY

Today, most school systems offer programs for learning disabled students at the secondary level. The development of these programs reflects staff preferences, the unique organizational structure of secondary schools and specific requirements imposed at this level. Collectively, these features represent a major influence on instructional decisions and often prohibit sufficient attention to students' holistic needs.

Emerging literature suggests that isolated, deficit-driven programs provided from a restricted temporal perspective are incompatible with LD students' comprehensive needs. This paper provided a framework for examining present secondary programs, acknowledged constraints that may inhibit a holistic approach and described strategies to address the question, "What Should We Be Doing?"

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